

c2\kschool  
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Q: What can new studies of the Cuban Missile Crisis--and other nuclear crises--add to the studies of the Cuban and Berlin Crises being pursued by the Kennedy School? Why should their work be expected to be inadequate?

The Kennedy School acts much as if it were the RAND Corporation, and its studies tend to have the same flavor, and limitations. Though it does not do classified work (officially, so far as I know--though Dean Allison's one-day-a-week consultation for Secretary of Defense Weinberger must have been entirely classified) the output I have seen from the School does not differ from RAND's in reflecting an apparent concern to maintain the trust and good opinion of the White House and the Office of Secretary of Defense through successive administrations. *and to keep a get chances. Note men with chances.*

This concern for access, influence and a potentially intimate relationship with the Executive Branch isn't altogether bad--Rand does some good studies and has some useful influence, and so does the Kennedy School--but it does put limits on the questions that get raised, the sources of information used, the hypotheses examined and the standards of evidence and proof applied to various kinds of these, the kinds of understanding sought and the uses envisioned for these.

In the case of the output so far on the Cuban Missile Crisis, the transcripts of symposia and the Blight and Welch book (On the Brink: Americans and Soviets Reexamine the Cuban Missile Crisis, N.Y. 1989) present interesting material (in particular from the Soviet participants: this was a real breakthrough, well justifying the support from various sponsors).

Yet on the American side--with inputs drawn, characteristically, predominantly from former officials, and secondarily from analysts who have long relied on official access, consulting arrangements or research contracts--there are several rather glaring biases or systematic omissions, which relate to the observation above. *chances*

1) There is little evidence of an ability either in the participants or the interviewers and their commentary (neither Blight nor Welch fall in either of the categories above) to look either critically or realistically at US relations to Cuba in the early Sixties.

The focus on this dimension of the crisis by the Soviets is perhaps the most significant contribution of the Harvard Project to American discussion of the crisis. But none of the American participants rose to this challenge in the meetings so far

reported (the recent Moscow meeting may have been different in this respect).

The former officials continue, it appears, simply to conceal or to lie about major aspects of their own role, and the others seem to refrain from challenging these omissions and lies. The net findings, some of which are rather obviously false in the light of new evidence revealed by analysts outside the project, are reported as a new "lesson"--about Soviet "misperception" as a central basis for the crisis, along with US "unawareness" of the Soviet misperception--which seems probably to be unfounded and significantly misleading. *Could not have warned SU about this - without changing policy!*

2. More generally, one finds in such Kennedy School products as the books by Blight and Welch and by Neustadt and May (Thinking in Time, N.Y. 1986) an evident unwillingness to criticise John F. Kennedy--or indeed, any recent American president--in any fundamental or challenging way, if at all. Conjectures and assertions about a president's point of view, aims, priorities, constraints, judgments, responses, proclivities are all compatible with the loyal, uncritical, trustworthy perspective of a President's Man.

That sets a good example, in a practical sense, for graduate students whose highest ambition is to become President's Men. But it is not an adequate basis for approaching an understanding of recent historical process, in an era when national interests, broadly or even narrowly conceived, have not always been well served by our presidents, or their advisors from Harvard.

④ "misreading the signs": why crisis started, and why it ended.

5. Specifically: elements of provocation; definitions of loss

(as well as legal) (and frustrated). (US actions illegal, aggressive)

(A) (A) (SU claim of FA absence  
this - make them look  
guilty).

aggression was occurring  
in Cuba - is left - bet: US)

(B) Bluff - bluffing of loss

Under-est. "Risks" of actual course - even if bluff. (Thus, break as how crisis really ended - real risks, not misperception of losses!)

c) Bluff of "confession" / no claim (awareness of no choice)

⑤ Mutual public on urgency; and on resolution

("not in US positions; or in risk-taking preparations") ("Bitter commitment")  
CA, ...

⑥ Parity issue: US / SU / TW  
see 9 April notes